

PUBLIC HEALTH SECTOR AUDITS

786. Mr M.F. BOARD to the Minister for Health:

I refer to the Auditor General's report on public health sector audits, tabled in this House today, which found that the Department of Health's delay in reporting performance indicators was cause for concern as management should be monitoring financial operations and executing performance accountability functions during the accounting period.

- (1) Will the minister confirm that the Auditor General has found serious deficiencies in the financial and performance reporting of the Department of Health, including omission of data, lack of expenditure control and lack of comprehensive data?
- (2) Will the minister confirm that the Auditor General has issued a qualified opinion of him, in his role as head of metropolitan public hospitals, as a result of lack of controls exercised over special purpose accounts and expenditure?
- (3) Will the minister now concede that the complete lack of financial and service accountability within his department, as reported by the Auditor General today, is causing massive blow-outs in the health budget and a general lack of control and clinical services as a result of money being directed to the wrong areas?

Mr R.C. KUCERA replied:

- (1)-(3) Firstly, the member is misleading the House with his last statement. That is not the case and it is not what the Auditor General said.

Mr M.F. Board interjected.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: The member asked a question and he should listen to the answer. The Auditor General is quite right in some of his criticisms, but he is not deeming me specifically responsible. The member for Murdoch should rephrase his question. He should have gone to the briefing with the Auditor General, as everybody else did, and get that qualified.

Over the past two and a half years the Department of Health has gone through an enormous change, and in the process has come down from over 100-odd boards and authorities that were reporting to me as minister -

Mrs C.L. Edwardes interjected.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: I am happy to take responsibility, unlike the member with her portfolios when she was a minister. A qualified audit has been carried out, which is quite right, but 44 annual reports had to be done across the State. Next year, for the very first time, this State will have a single unified health system with a single unified report. Yes, the report detailed issues and I will touch on one of those issues, which was clearly explained -

Mr M.F. Board interjected.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: Did the member go to the briefing?

Mr M.F. Board: I have read the report in total. Why do I have to go to the briefing? I have read the whole report from cover to cover.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, members!

Mr R.C. KUCERA: The report refers to issues such as postal remittances, and we must look at this issue because there is a clash with patient confidentiality. A patient may write to a doctor and mark the letter confidential, and that particular piece of correspondence may contain a remittance. Because of the confidentiality issues between patients and doctors, that mail will go straight to the doctor and it may contain confidential information about that patient and that patient's relationship with the doctor. That is a clear problem for us in complying with the Financial Administration and Audit Act. The Director General of Health said we need to move forward on this issue. These reports are designed to do one thing and one thing only - to make sure there is accountability. I am happy to take responsibility for any criticism in my portfolio, because the portfolio needs to go through major reform to get it out of the mess that it was left in by the previous mob.